VIJAY IYER
COMPASSION
LINDA MAY HAN OH
TYSHAWN SOREY
ECM

COMPASSION

VIJAY IYER piano
LINDA MAY HAN OH double bass
TYSHAWN SOREY drums

1 **Compassion** 4:50
Vijay Iyer

2 **Arch** 6:13
Vijay Iyer

3 **Overjoyed** 7:52
Stevie Wonder

4 **Maelstrom** 4:36
Vijay Iyer

5 **Prelude: Orison** 3:43
Vijay Iyer

6 **Tempest** 6:24
Vijay Iyer

7 **Panegyric** 6:34
Vijay Iyer

8 **Nonaah** 2:32
Roscoe Mitchell

9 **Where I Am** 5:44
Vijay Iyer

10 **Ghostrumental** 6:38
Vijay Iyer

11 **It Goes** 3:09
Vijay Iyer

12 **Free Spirits / Drummer's Song** 7:14
John Stubblefield / Geri Allen

I am interested in critically examining the world in which we live, asking questions about why it functions the way it does, and using imaginative work as a way of thinking through how it could be otherwise.

– Eve L. Ewing

In 2021 I asked Wadada Leo Smith to share his thoughts on what it means to say that an instrumental piece can be "about" something. He replied: "The key word is inspiration… Inspiration is that influx of knowledge that is being revealed, and it doesn't require a teacher or an in between state. And the creative musician who is a composer-performer equally has an opportunity to express the inspiration that comes exactly at that moment… It's pure; it comes straight on through… I believe that it's [through] inspiration that the work of art gains its authenticity, its identity, and its meaning. And it lives on, just like we do, as long as somebody remembers it." Smith's insight tells us that music is always about, animated by, and giving expression to the world around us: people, relations, circumstances, revelations.

In 2022 I received a special gift: a wonderful piano was loaned to me that had belonged to the great Chick Corea (1941–2021). Sitting at it for the first time, I picked my way through Stevie Wonder's classic "Overjoyed." It was the same song that Corea had shared with the world a year earlier from the same instrument, during his final livestream: a gentle message of gratitude as his body quietly yielded to illness. As I fumbled through it, the song revealed itself to me not in its original form but in a celebratory variation, as if refracted by the piano's aura.

"Arch" is named for the fearless Archbishop Desmond Tutu (1931–2021), who helped topple apartheid in South Africa. "Maelstrom," "Tempest," and "Panegyric" were composed for *Tempest*, a project dedicated to victims of the pandemic(s), premiered at the Celebrate Brooklyn! Festival in 2021. "Prelude: Orison" borrows its theme from the opening of another composition of mine, "For My Father," dedicated to Y. Raghunathan (1933–2021), the most compassionate man I have known.

Elsewhere we find inspiration in the compositions of elders Roscoe Mitchell and John Stubblefield (the latter via Mary Lou Williams); later, the reprise of a single measure from Geri Allen sends us spinning. "Where I Am," "Ghostrumental" and "It Goes" were composed for *Ghosts Everywhere I Go*, a 2022 ensemble project inspired by the writings of Chicago poet Eve L. Ewing. "It Goes" accompanied a poem that imagines Emmett Till as an elder still among us, enjoying the ordinary life that should have been his.

The unease I experience making art in times of suffering never goes away, nor should it; that tension shapes the creative process at every stage. Its counterpart, the response to its call, is the rejuvenating feeling of making music with, for, and among people. I am endlessly inspired by Tyshawn and Linda, two extraordinary musicians of consequence, who open their hearts, listen with care, and take purposeful action. We developed all of this music onstage, out in the world, in spaces of community and encounter. I am no more qualified than anyone else to tell you anything new about compassion. But I hope that this word, placed alongside this music, offers us all a reminder, an assurance, a plea, and perhaps an inspiration – to find each other in this together. Thank you for listening.

Vijay Iyer
August 2023

Recorded May 2022
Oktaven Audio, Mount Vernon, NY
Engineer: Ryan Streber
Mixed July/August 2022
Cover photo: Jan Kricke
Liner photos: Ogata (3), Christian Padron (7)
Design: Sascha Kleis
Produced by Vijay Iyer and Manfred Eicher

An ECM Production

Publishing:
Sonocentric Publishing (Vijay Iyer)
Jobete Music Co. Inc & Black Bull Music Inc. (Stevie Wonder)
Art Ensemble of Chicago Publishing Co. (Roscoe Mitchell)
Norahs Publishing / SteepleChase Music (John Stubblefield)
Antoinette Music / Pacific Wind Music (Geri Allen)

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Postfach 600 331, 81203 München

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